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Hamilton Fish: The Inner History of the Grant Administration by Allan Nevins; John Bassett Moore

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*Hamilton Fish: The Inner History of the Grant Administration.* By ALLAN NEVINS. With an Introduction by John Bassett Moore. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company. 1936. Pp. xxi, 932. \$5.00.)

THE writing of this volume offered a unique opportunity. A biography of Fish had long been awaited, and an unusual body of papers, including the elaborate Fish diary, was available to the biographer. The importance of the book derives in part from this favorable opportunity, but even more from the author's talent for readableness, his wide familiarity with the period, and his skillful use of materials. The diary, not as devoid of color as has been supposed, is one of the most complete of personal journals (about a million words for the years 1869-1877); in addition, there are the voluminous Fish papers, a notable collection of letter books and letters received.

The closeness of Fish to the Revolution appears in the person of his father, Nicholas Fish, a man of substance and importance who fought beside Washington and Lafayette and who became a vigorous Federalist and friend of Alexander Hamilton. On the mother's side were the Stuyvesants; connection with the Keans and Livingstons came by marriage. The result, in the person of Hamilton Fish, was a combination of social position, Knickerbocker pride, and Federalist-Whig conservatism. Support of vested interests, detestation of Democrats and locofocos, and prominent identification with the Episcopal Church, Columbia College, and the Society of the Cincinnati, united to produce a sturdy New Yorker who would cherish an elder Americanism, befriend property, and resist social change, yet withal a man of tact and courtesy, capable of sound judgments and incapable of fanatical excess. He would never be a reformer or even a liberal; on the other hand, never could he tolerate the political buccaneer. His public service prior to 1868 (as congressman, governor, and senator) was of less formative significance than the aristocratic nature of his clients, the close association with Clay and Webster, and the broadening effect of European travel. His Republicanism seemed as inevitable as his prominence among the city's elite; yet he came to the party as a moderate and as one who wistfully lamented the Whig demise.

To write fully of Fish as diplomat would be to treat many diverse subjects—Central America, the Danish islands, the Fenians, China, Russia, *et cetera*; instead of this, Professor Nevins gives prominence only to the three most important fields, which were Santo Domingo, Cuba, and Great Britain. On the Dominican question Fish went along reluctantly with the President though not without a healthy disdain for annexationist intrigue. As to Cuba, he had a problem of major difficulty in the resistance to interventionist schemes and, in the *Virginius* affair, the avoidance of war with Spain. In the notable settlement of the *Alabama* claims with Great Britain Fish kept the guiding hand, and here he reached both his highest achievement and the greatest pride of his life. When reading of the obstacles that beset diplomacy

in this field one may well marvel that international dealings ever succeed. The tale involves a sorry mixture of arrogance, lion-baiting, newspaper excess, peevish intransigence in the Senate's foreign relations head (Sumner), insubordination in the American minister at London (Motley), nationalist emotion which demanded a face-saving "victory", demands for the surrender of all Canada (which, by the way, some English leaders were willing to consider), and, on the part of the President, ignorance of international relations combined with a tendency toward erratic appointments and a reluctance to give the secretary a free hand. Despite these obstacles success did come; and, though fortune caused the factors to snap into place "like tumblers in a gigantic combination-lock" (p. 423), yet the success was very largely that of Fish. It was he who made Washington the center of negotiation, joined the *Alabama* question with other pending disputes, obtained a friendly expression of regret, resisted the fantastic "indirect claims", which seemed to imply that Britain was responsible for the whole Civil War, and suggested Charles Francis Adams as American arbitrator. In reading of this postwar struggle over England's neutrality policy one is reminded that, contrary to a widespread tradition, it was the Confederacy, not the United States, that suffered severe disappointment at London.

Of equal importance with the *Alabama* question, though it comes late in the book, is Professor Nevins's treatment of internal affairs under Grant, to which Fish in the second term (1873-1877) devoted much more attention than during the first. Disgusted at the President's confidence in his false friends, and thoroughly shocked at such influences as those of Babcock, McDonald, Casey, Gould, and Fisk, the Secretary of State, having been pathetically eager to resign about 1871 and having repeatedly pressed Grant to accept his resignation, decided to remain. He thus contributed somewhat of substance and respectability to an administration degraded by backstairs intrigue, partisanship, abuse, and amazing corruption. Fish's "ruling emotion" (p. 647) was anger at those who perpetrated the scandals; Grant's was anger at their exposure. Through all this domestic and international story there ran the steadying counsel of Fish; and in the account before us there runs in every chapter the contribution of the Fish record (*vide*, for example, new material on Grant's alleged "packing" of the Supreme Court, pp. 306 ff.). Nor have other sources been neglected. The Public Record Office in London, the diplomatic archives of the United States, and the voluminous published documents have been extensively used.

One leaves the book with a sense of the complexity and the present-day bearings of the Grant era and with the feeling that even in the crowded field of Anglo-American relations significant contributions are yet possible. Too often is diplomatic history written from official documents; too seldom are personal data behind the public record adequately explored. It is in this latter sense that Professor Nevins makes his contribution to the history of inter-

national relations, though it should be added that he was primarily writing a life of Fish, together with a most significant inner account of the Grant administration. Despite the heavy subject matter the style dispels dullness and even rises to brilliance in its social descriptions (*e.g.*, ch. xxiv on "Potomac Backgrounds") and its thumbnail characterizations (*e.g.*, of Grant, pp. 131 ff., and of Belknap, p. 806). The author, while making suggestions to monograph writers, intends his book "for the general reader and ordinary student". It is to be hoped that it will have a wide enough reading to diminish popular ignorance in the field covered.

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*The Second United Order among the Mormons.* By EDWARD J. ALLEN. (New York: Columbia University Press. 1936. Pp. 148. \$2.25.)

THE founder of Mormonism was liberally infected with the communistic ideas current in his generation, and soon after the Church was organized, the Prophet proclaimed a divine revelation commanding the Saints to associate themselves in the communistic Order of Enoch. The experiment was snuffed out in Missouri by the enforced expulsion of the Saints; in Ohio its feeble breath of life flickered out in the opening throes of the panic of 1837.

Four decades later Brigham Young, now at the height of his power, thought to avert the threatened loss of temporal power to the Church hierarchy by drawing the Saints into a modified and somewhat feeble imitation of the Order of Enoch as instituted by Joseph Smith. The present volume narrates the short life and utter failure of this modified essay at communism. Not all the power of God, operating through his mouthpiece Joseph in the thirties, nor of Brigham Young, operating as his own mouthpiece in the seventies, could force the Saints into the communistic pattern of life.

Considered simply as a study of the Utah experiment of the seventies, the book is thorough and, apparently, definitive. The author, an adherent of the Utah faction of Mormonism, disposes of all rival factions by the simple procedure of ignoring their existence. For example, "Brigham Young was now [following the killing of Joseph Smith in 1844] recognized as the new leader of the Mormons and continued to be their leader in temporal and spiritual affairs until his death" (p. 22). Thereby he falls into an error which needlessly imperils the character, otherwise scholarly, of his study. Even the title is erroneous, for it belongs not to the Utah experiment of Brigham Young but rather to the Order of Enoch, instituted by James J. Strang in Wisconsin thirty years earlier. Strang's essay at communism, like Smith's before and Young's after it, met with complete failure and early abandonment.

A century has passed since the failure of Joseph's Order and over half a century since the collapse of Brigham's, yet still (p. 128) "the Church does not concede defeat of the Order . . . but contends that God's plan is too